

Child Life Specialists

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify the important roles of a Child Life Specialist in many different areas of work. Child Life Specialists have graduated with different types of education and techniques to children and parents who need the guidance. They have impacted many lives in hospital settings and have helped families out tremendously through difficult times. Through answering medical questions, fun and learning games, and many coping techniques, the hospital and families have been change for the better with the help of Child Life Specialists.

Child Life Specialists play an important role in answering questions, teaching and sharing coping techniques to co-workers, patients and families. They are the ones who help children have a better feeling about what hospitals are really like. These Specialists have lots of schooling and practice before their tactics are put into play. They have many rolls they have to fulfill in a days work. They interact with both inpatient and outpatients and have different techniques and teaching tactics for each of these patients. These Specialists also have large effects on patients and families and are able to build relationships with children and their families. A Child Life Specialist benefits several people and many hospitals they work in.

A Child Life Specialist is an upbeat person who tries to make life more exciting and hopeful for children and their families while in the hospital. There are many services that has Child Life Specialists provide in their work. They also have many goals for themselves as well. According to Sanford Hospital in Sioux Falls, SD "Sanford Children's Child Life Specialists are here to help children and their families cope with the emotional, developmental and social changes brought about by the illness, injury or hospitalization." They are known to teach and help families with any questions or problems they may have.

There are many services that a Child Life Specialist has to attend to in a one day's work. One service would be to calm and educate patients. Their most important job is to help children who come to the hospital go into treatments or take certain medicines without any fear of them. According to Avera McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls "these child development experts promote effective coping through play, self-expression activities, and age-appropriate medical preparation and education." Depending on the Specialist they may have different tactics on how to calm and relax patients before procedures, but it also depends on the patients. Every child has

many different ways of thinking and certain procedures can be a lot scarier to some children than to others. Another service they have is to provide any questions or help parents or siblings with any emotional support they need. They do everything they can to help families out while in the hospital. According to Sanford Hospital in Sioux Falls "we also are here to provide emotional and educational support to parents and siblings." The final service they accomplish is for the hospital itself. They provide painting projects and plan for therapy dogs to come in and see and distract children from why they are in the hospital.

Child Life Specialists have many goals in their line of work. They strive to teach, inform, answer questions and normalize children's lives in a hospital. Informing patients and families is a large goal because they never want families and children feeling confused and they want them to be able to understand everything that may be going on.

Becoming a Child Life Specialist is not easy. Child Life Specialists are required to have graduated with a minimum of a bachelors degree to be qualified and prepared to give the care and comfort children and their families need while in the hospital. There are many studies and hard work that has to go into this profession before getting to where you want to be.

Having a four-year degree in child psychology or a related field is the minimum for a Child Life Specialist. According to recent studies "most employers require child life specialists to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree." There are also a certain number of hours one needs to accumulate as an intern to earn a certificate in Child Life. After receiving the bachelors degree you have receive a certification from the Child Life Council to be a certified Child Life Specialist.

There are many different types of degrees one can get for an acceptable major for becoming a Child Life Specialist. Acceptable majors include: Child and Family Studies, Psychology, Child Development, Recreational Therapy, and Early Childhood Education. According to the Child Life Council "Applicants must have completed a total of 10 college-level courses in child life or a related department/subject." You must complete the Child Life program or one of the qualified majors for the opportunity to apply to be a Child Life Specialist.

Lots a preparation is needed to be put into this profession. Child Life Specialists have to be prepared for anything that comes through the front doors of the hospital. Being prepared for the worst can only be best because you never know what type of situation they are going to have to deal with.

Child life specialists have many roles, but their most important roles are to inform, prepare, and answer any questions patients and their families may have. Informing and preparing is the most important of this job, but they also want to take weight off children and families shoulders and make sure everyone is emotionally fine too. There could be a numerous amount of questions for a Specialist in one day. Being prepared for these questions is important because every single day at work the days will be different. There is no situation that will be the same so knowing and being prepared for any situation and question will be best.

One of the most important roles of a Child Life Specialist is to inform and prepare children and their parents about things they will encounter in the hospital. According to Mayo Clinic "the work centers on helping children and their families adjust to and cope with the health care environment and the many events that happen during a hospital stay or clinic visit."

Specialists try to inform children what they will see or maybe what they will feel physically and emotionally when going into a procedure so they will not be as scared.

As a part of their job Child Life Specialists need to be able to answer any questions a patient or any of their family member had. According to Boston Children's Hospital "Child Life Specialists are also available to help families with questions that may arise about a child's behavior and adjustment to home or school after they have been in the hospital." Questions are crucial in the hospital, especially when it could affect a child emotionally. Specialists try their best to answer all the questions they can and normalize the hospital for children for a better time there. A variety of questions may be asked, but the most common questions are about effects of medication, who can come visit, and what should parents bring to the hospital for their child to feel more comfortable.

Child life specialists do not just work in hospitals, but other places such as dentist offices and camps for kids. They are there if they are ever needed for information or to calm a child. An outpatient is someone who comes to the clinic or hospital, but is never admitted to stay overnight. According to the Official U.S. Government Site for Medicare "You're an outpatient if you're getting emergency department services, observation services, outpatient surgery, lab tests, or X-rays, or any other hospital services, and the doctor hasn't written an order to admit you to a hospital as an inpatient." Although these patients do not stay in the hospital, there may still be children who need calmed or parents that may need questions answered by a Specialist.

There are many places where a Child Life Specialist can work to assist outpatients, such as clinics, dental offices and camps or other programs for children. According to the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota "Since the professional skills of child life specialists involve helping children and

families under stress, their skills have applications in multiple environments." These skills that they have are useful in many different places and not just the hospital. Although the hospital Child Life Specialist is more well known by others they can be very beneficial in these other settings as well.

With outpatients Child Life Specialists are unable to use their skills as much as an inpatient. They have to do a lot of just explaining and preparing rather than making a child feel more comfortable with where they are at. If they have to use a calming skill it will be more in a dentist setting for the dentist to finish a task that may seem scary to younger children, but is necessary.

An inpatient is someone who needs care over a period of time and is admitted into the hospital to stay for one or more. They could be in the hospital for an infinite amount of time. Inpatients are able to interact more with a child Life specialist more than outpatients do; after explaining and answering questions child life specialists work to normalize the hospital for patients. "Inpatient care generally refers to any medical service that requires admission into a hospital. Inpatient care tends to be directed towards more serious ailments and trauma that require one or more days of overnight stay at a hospital" (ValuePenguin).

The way Child Life Specialists care for inpatients is tremendously different from outpatients. After explaining and preparing kids and families they have to care for them as a family member of their own or just make them feel comfortable for their stay. In this type of situation there are more playful and organized activities for patients. For example, in many hospitals there are playrooms they can visit and play in for whenever they would like. According to Seattle Children's Hospital, "our inpatient playroom is a place for fun, safe, supportive play

and social interaction." Many Specialists will arrange for therapy dogs to come and visit patients to brighten a child's day. In this type of situation dogs can be very helpful. Most kids adore animals and animals love being petted and played with. These dogs are able to come to hospitals and be loved by many, but also making a child feel happier as well. "A visit from a therapy dog gives many patients the energy and motivation they need to make progress and to experience joy, even in the midst of challenging circumstances" (Seattle Children's Hospital). These play rooms and therapy dogs help children feel more comfortable and happy during their stay in the hospital.

There are lots of therapies that Specialists use. Some that are used in different hospitals are painting projects, the play room, and therapy dogs. Play rooms are filled with books, toys and many games for kids to get their minds off things and have fun with their family or maybe a volunteer in the play room area. These rooms are painted brightly with many happy settings painted or put up on the wall. All the activities in the play rooms are to help a child forget why they are in the hospital and just to have fun. Seattle Children's Hospital states "Patients and their brothers and sisters, accompanied by an adult family member, are welcome in the playroom." I believe that these rooms truly make a difference for patients lives. They are able to play with siblings and parents just as they would at their own home. Therapy dogs are calm dogs that love kids and when they arrive to the hospital they walk around to see all the patients. "Benefits include stress reduction, normalization of the hospital environment and overall feelings of comfort and happiness" (Seattle Children's Hospital). These therapies can be very effective, but with the patients who are more fearful it may take a while for them to be comfortable with a Child Life Specialist.



A Child Life Specialist has many positive effects on patients and their families. They work very hard for families and their children due to the needs and fears their children have and also from the support they give. Children have certain needs, such as foods they cannot eat or certain games or toys they are unable to play with due to their conditions or lots of cords they have hooked up to the, because it is hard to comprehend what may be going on. According to Child Life Council "they have distinct needs for managing the effects of stress and trauma." Specialists need and know most of these needs before interacting with these children and prepare for any projects or games they are able to do.

With the help of Child Life Specialists in hospitals a lot of children lose their fears of any type of procedure they may be facing. Children who interact with a Child Life Specialist may also feel less stress because they will be calm and happier because their experience is more fun and or safe "Children who are prepared for medical procedures experience less fear and anxiety, and will have better long term adjustment to medical challenges" (Child Life). Additionally, "Children in the hospital who engage in therapeutic play with a trained professional exhibit less emotional distress, increased cooperation, and fewer negative physiological responses" (Child Life). Giving children happiness and less fear while in the hospital can be very helpful to the families onto worrying more about what the doctors are telling them while Specialists care for the children.

Child Life Specialists also try to give a family as much support as possible. People never know what a family may be going through, but after learning about why the family is there and know how to approach the family to give them support can help a family out tremendously.

"Providing support for family members enhances psychosocial outcomes for young

patients" (Child Life). The attitude and behavior of a family member or loved one can greatly affect how their child or how a patient feels. "A parent or caregiver's behavior and anxiety levels are strongly correlated with how a child will respond to hospitalization" (Child Life). Specialists try to assist parents and families as much as possible. Simply giving parents a small break can give them time to think about the situation they are in without worrying their child.

A Child Life Specialists can become very close with patients and family from their time together in the hospital. Many relationships are built during time in the hospital and not just with nurses and doctors, but with a Child Life Specialist as well. They build great friendships with patients. They also build good relationships with parents to help them with what they are going through mentally as long as what their child is going through.

After a long period of time a patient and a Child Life Specialist can build a very strong relationship with each other. If patients are in the hospital for a long period of time then they are able to get to know all of the nurses and Child Life Specialists on a more personal level than an outpatient would. Their goal is for children to have the best times in the hospital.

A Child Life Specialist not only gets to know the patients on a personal level, but parents and siblings as well. If siblings are present in the hospital with the patient then the Child Life Specialist is able to explain many things to them and also keep their mind off what is going on with their sibling that is in the hospital. Siblings also get scared and worried for the health of their senility that is in the hospital. Specialists can also get close to parents as well. They love to help them out as much as possible and the best things they could do for the parents is give them a break so they can get some fresh air to think about the things changing in their lives at the moment. Specialists try to the best of their ability to help these families in any way. "Child life

specialist Jeanne Higgins Bergin, who recommends making sure that these families know they are not alone by acknowledging the situation, listening and being empathetic, and offering concrete ways to help" (Child Life Council).

There are many benefits to having a Child Life Specialist a part of the hospital team to help make children feel more at home during their stay: they help out all of their co-workers tremendously and they continue to learn from each other. Specialists not only benefit co-workers and the hospital, but children and their families as well. They are benefiting them in many different ways as well.

Child Life Specialists are able to teach and learn from their co-workers. Most work daily with many nurses and some doctors. Specialists learn many medications and effects of them that would happen to a child from doctors and nurses. Specialists would teach them though about the emotional part of a Child and what they may be able to do help a child or family out if a Specialist was not available at the time.

Children and patients benefited from Child Life Specialists from having positive attitudes on how a hospital really is how the people there are trying to help them and make them feel better. They are able to calm and relax patients in scarier settings that they may not understand because of their young age. They do this by talking with them about normal things, playing games, doing puzzles and the more common one is playing on an iPad or tablet the hospital buys for Specialists to use.

Child Life Specialists benefit parents and siblings by informing on any traumatic or procedures their children or siblings encounter. With the schooling and degrees that these Specialists have they are able to tell bad in good news to parents in siblings in many ways. They

also having many techniques they can teach the families. If they are needed they teach them different coping mechanisms they may need through any of the rough patches in their life whether they had lost a loved one or just not sure where to go from the hospital.

Child Life Specialists play an important role answering questions, teaching and sharing coping techniques to co-workers, patients and families. Specialists help children and families daily, around the world in and out of hospitals. There have been many positive outcomes with the help of Child Life Specialists. Having outcomes on how strongly a Child Life Specialists in hospital has affected the outcome of patients and families visits across the county.

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